Learning at work, organisational opportunities and individual engagement: A case study of a New Zealand wine company

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This paper explores the issue of the development of people's capability at work. The case study reported here – on a wine company in New Zealand –is the first empirical phase of a large research project, *Developing human capability: employment institutions, organizations and individuals.* The aim of this project is to explore the optimal conditions for the development of the capability of workers in New Zealand organisations, taking account of issues at the level of government policy and practice, industrial relations frameworks, organisational HR structures and practices, and individual engagement with learning at work. The primary focus of this paper is exploring the interaction of the types of opportunities the company offers for the development of individuals' capability, and the engagement of workers at various levels with those opportunities.

The paper begins with an overview of the wine industry in which this case study is located and goes on to review literature about the workplace as an environment for learning and for the development of capability. This section concludes with the research questions to be explored through the case analysis. We then briefly describe our methodology before moving on to discuss our results, where we explore how affordances for development are differentially distributed within the company and how individual agency mediates the extent to which individuals proactively seek out development opportunities or attempt to resist them.

The wine industry

In 1970 New Zealand's total wine exports amounted to just $41,000. Thirty-five years later exports have grown to more than 31.1 million litres worth an estimated $302.6 million (New Zealand Winegrowers Annual Report, 2004). Despite phenomenal growth the wine industry as a whole has tended to be characterised by small

companies run by owner/managers with a love for wine but not necessarily with any formal credentials. Although the vast majority of the 403 wineries and 594 grape-growers in New Zealand are small, owner-managed operations increasingly companies (including the one discussed here) have at least some element of off-shore ownership and there is growing involvement by multi-national companies. As the industry becomes more global and competitive, ever more technical, and faced with more compliance needs there is increasing pressure on the smaller companies in terms of sheer survival, and more inclination in the larger companies, to formalise employee development processes and to seek credentialised staff. The growth in wine making and viticulture degrees, diplomas and certificates, attests to the growing credentialisation of the industry.

Nonetheless, in this industry technical skills, even where based on formal theoretical study, are usually honed in experience. Wine making tends to evoke images of the aged expert from whom others learn over a lifetime. As with the wine itself, maturity is prized and tended. In that respect the informal learning of the apprentice and the experiential learning of those who will become the masters has been highly valued. However, in an increasingly globalised and fast-paced market it is not surprising that this extended maturation period causes frustration for some. Conversely, others mourn the intrusion of contemporary management and business practices into the wine making process and also the emerging expectation that good jobs should simply follow on from acquisition of qualifications. For those in the industry this throws into sharp relief the tensions and paradoxes of relying on both art and craft in the development of its product, and poses questions about how to balance tradition with the new realities of operating in a highly competitive global marketplace.

While the skills of the viticulturalists and the wine-makers are acknowledged and generally well-rewarded, it is also true that the wine industry continues to rely on large numbers of semi-skilled staff, who are not well-paid and whose route into the industry is usually through manual or casual jobs in the horticulture industry, as well as on gangs of contract labour used to deal with routine (yet crucial) jobs like pruning and picking. Hence the industry provides an interesting environment in which to consider the new focus on workplace learning, against a backdrop of growing interest in and use of "formal" credentials and increasing compliance training needs.

Literature review

The notion of capability is debated in assorted literatures that have focussed on such diverse aspects as organisational capability, economic capability, and individual human capability (e.g., Barney, 1991; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Collis, 1994; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Winter, 2003; Brown & McCartney, 2004). There seems to be little agreement as to what is meant by capability, with the concept variously portrayed as an outcome (a capable nation, an effective economy, a capable worker, an informed citizen); an output (productivity, performance), and an input (knowledge, competency, ability to perform) (for a discussion see Bryson, 2004. In this paper we focus on the development of individual capability within a work- organisational setting. We view capability as the sustained ability to perform, which implies existence of skills and knowledge for today's work as well as a preparedness to grow and develop for future needs. Thus, to think about capability requires attention not only to training and development but to on-going learning and building learning capacity. Given our focus on the individual at work we are interested in the conditions in workplaces which foster capability development both by offering specific opportunities to develop and utilise skills and knowledge, and by encouraging and facilitating on-going learning.

The skills, knowledge and learning capacity of the workforce have been widely heralded as the route to competitive success (e.g. Pfeffer, 1994; 1998; Huselid, 1995; Becker & Gerhart, 1996), so attention has turned to the work-place as the conduit and context for learning and to work organisations as learning organisations. Tight (2000) describes what he calls the academic tribes working in the area of learning and work, including adult/continuing/lifelong education, organisational behaviour/occupational psychology, and management development/learning studies. He focuses on the adult/continuing/lifelong education "tribe", and argues that it can add a more radical and political perspective than the management literature. Indeed, we have found very valuable insights in the adult learning literature using it as a counterpoint to the overtly managerialist and functionalist stance of much HRM and knowledge management literature, and to the empirically weak and conceptually disputed literature on learning organisations.

While the various bodies of literature are diverse we see two common threads in much contemporary discussion on learning and development at work regardless of 'tribal' affliations: 1) a focus on 'informal", less structured learning and on tacit skills and knowledge; 2) a focus on individual responsibility for learning and development

The move to "informal" learning

As a corrective to the long-standing conjunction of learning with formal, off-job or class-room based study, recent interest in workplace learning has concentrated on less didactic and more situated, participative and activity-based notions of learning (Billett, 2002a; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). At the same time the emerging discourse of life-long learning has drawn attention to learning as a process rather than a series of discrete activities. Marsick and Watkins (1990) were influential in focusing attention on what they called informal and incidental learning at work, although Billett (2004) warns that viewed through a perspective which privileges educational settings as the site of "real learning", such learning can be seen as ad-hoc or weak. Billett (2004) goes on to note that far from being incidental much workplace learning is in fact central to the activities of the organisation and can be highly structured and intentional.

While there is now considerable agreement that the workplace is an important site for learning some believe that the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of privileging "informal" learning (Rainbird, Munro & Holly, 2004) and that the potential benefits of employee learning through traditional knowledge and skill-based courses and qualifications have been downplayed (Pajo, Mallon & Ward, 2005). Others have also challenged the preoccupation with workplace learning as a purely situated, tacit, informal, and social process. They have variously pointed to the neglect by situated theories of learning of aspects such as 'curriculum' content and the possible contribution of conceptual and theoretical knowledge to effective job performance (Eraut, 2004; Summers, Williamson & Read, 2004; Young, 2004), the role of individual agency (Billett, 2002a; Bresnen, Goussevskaia & Swan, 2004; Evans, Kersh & Sakamoto, 2004), structural conditions that limit effective on-the-job learning (Billett, 2002a; Bresnen et al, 2004; Cox, 2004; Rainbird et al., 2004), the emancipatory potential of off-the-job knowledge-based courses and formal

qualifications (Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004) and the continuing demand for such courses by employees (Young, 2004).

In an effort to establish some measure of rapprochement amongst these diverse approaches to employee development Fuller and Unwin (2004) proposed a heuristic that categorises work place learning environments on a continuum ranging from restrictive to expansive. According to Fuller and Unwin expansive learning environments are identifiable by such features as: employee participation in multiple communities of practice including those external to the workplace; a shared tradition of development within the primary community of practice; encouragement of diverse learning in terms of tasks, knowledge and location of the development experience; supporting employee efforts to acquire formal qualifications; allowing time-off from work for reflection or to access other learning opportunities; an emphasis on the gradual transition by employees to full competence and participation; promotion of learning as a vehicle for employee career advancement and building organisational capability; organisational acknowledgement and support for employees as learners; employee development initiatives that provide opportunities for boundary crossing; the encouragement of cross-boundary communication; a workforce where skills are broadly distributed; the establishment of a concrete workplace curriculum easily accessible by learners; and a workplace where technical skills are valued and managers act as facilitators of employee development. In contrast a restrictive learning environment is one where: participation in multiple communities of practice is limited; there is no shared tradition of development within the community of practice; learning opportunities are limited in terms of tasks, knowledge and location of the development experience; there is little support for employee efforts to gain formal qualifications; most learning is on-the-job with few chances for reflection; the emphasis is on employees transitioning to full participation as quickly as possible; workplace learning is purely focussed on developing skills required for the employee's current job; there is little in the way of organisational acknowledgement or support for employees as learners; there are few opportunities for boundary crossing; communication is circumscribed; the distribution of skills in the workforce is highly polarized; there is no concrete workplace curriculum; technical skills are taken for granted and managers act as gate-keepers and controllers of employee development.

The notion that workplaces can be characterised as more or less supportive of learning has also been explored by Billett (see Billett, 2002a; 2002b; 2004; Billett, Barker & Hernon-Tinning, 2004). He suggests that workplaces can be viewed as learning spaces with differing invitational qualities that reflect diverse activities, opportunities and support for learning. For instance, the workplace may afford opportunities ranging from structured or guided learning like mentoring, coaching, and questioning through to learning derived from everyday participation at work. These invitational qualities or workplace affordances are thought to impact on the quality of learning experiences, learning outcomes, and ultimately workplace performance.

Both Billett (2002a; 2002b; 2004) and Fuller and Unwin (2004) argue for the importance of job design and the context in which workplace learning takes place. Where they part company is with regards to what they see as the scope of workplace affordances. Fuller and Unwin generally take a broader perspective on workforce development in a deliberate effort to address what they see as hitherto neglected aspects in the literature on communities of practice. More specifically, their model highlights the salience of opportunities for employees to engage in multiple communities of practice and also takes into account the role of formal knowledge-based courses and qualifications. In a number of case studies of private sector organisations in the steel industry Fuller and Unwin observed that learning environments that were more expansive and offered employees diverse forms of participation appeared to foster learning at work.

Access and opportunity appear to be two key determinants in the ability of workplaces to provide positive learning experiences for their employees which bring benefits to the wider organisation. This makes evidence highlighting structural inequalities in access to, and the provision of, education and training all the more alarming (Arulampalam & Booth, 1998; Booth, 1991). There remains a persistent gap between haves and have-nots in access to development opportunities (Rainbird et al., 2004). While it is clear that learning opportunities may be systematically afforded to some workers and denied to others, restrictive approaches to workforce development may simply follow from, and be suited to, particular organisational strategies and goals (Billett, 2004; Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Keep, 1997). On the other hand, it may be

that the structuring of learning experiences is more about issues of power, status, control and the advancement of particular interests. Irrespective of the underlying motivation we agree with Billett (2004) that the question of how access to participatory opportunities is 'distributed across workers or cohorts of workers in often contested workplaces [is] central to understanding learning through working life' (pp. 113-114).

Individual responsibility for learning

This brings us to our second observation concerning recent trends in the literature: the focus on the individual as the learner, developer, career maker. It is perhaps too simplistic to comment that this trend coincides with increasing competitive pressures on organisations and associated moves to down-size and increase flexibility, although Beck (1992) and others have made convincing arguments about the growing shift of organisations' risks to individuals. A countervailing argument is the realisation of the empowerment and pleasure for individuals as they recognise they need not be constrained by their early learning or career experiences and investments (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

Yet the real issues of power and labour market position (as well as gender and ethnicity) in individual responsibility for career and development have been understated (e.g. Rainbird et al., 2004; Collin & Young, 2000; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Blackler & McDonald, 2000) and the assumed mutuality of purpose and outcome for individual and organisation of learning activity is questionable (Thomson, Mabey, Storey, Gray & Iles, 2001; Fenwick, 1998); similarly empirical work on the dynamics of self-development in action points to the continuing primacy of organisational needs (Antonocopoulou, 2001). The assumption that individual learning and knowledge are commodities (Gherardi, 2000), useable for organisational competitive advantage, is still pervasive. The amount of choice and self-direction individuals have in their own learning and career is arguable (Grimshaw, Beynon, Rubery & Ward, 2002). Recently Boud and Solomon (2003) alerted us to the political dimensions of using the term "learner" and learning. Being signalled as a novice, or perceived as "not fully functioning" can have negative spin-offs for people at work. Bratton (2001) explored the politics of workplace learning in the context of lean production systems where learning ultimately equated to job losses. In this context he

argues that worker resistance to learning is part of the contested arena of productivity and job control. He discerns between learning *for* work which can (in some contexts) decrease job security and increase managerial control; and learning *at* work which leads to broader, transferable skills. Thus he reminds us that workplace learning is not a neutral process for the organisation or the worker (it can have social costs and benefits) and that organisational politics can impede learning.

The interaction between individual agency and organisational factors is a feature of the workplace learning models proposed by Billett (2002a; 2004) and Fuller and Unwin (2004). They suggest that the quality of learning at work is a product of both workplace affordances (Fuller and Unwin's expansive or restrictive learning environments) and individual engagement. Individual engagement is the process by which a participant chooses to take up the opportunities present in the workplace, a decision determined by a participant's values, knowledge, understandings and learning history (what Fuller and Unwin call the learning territory). Learning at work is premised on the dual and reciprocal interaction of these two elements. As Billett (2002b) has observed "individual agency mediates engagement with activities and what is learned through participation" such that individual engagement is co-participative "an interaction between how the workplace affords participation and individuals engage in that social practice" (p.29).

Shedding new light on learning at work

An emerging body of research on proactive individual behaviour in organisations (Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker, 2000) may assist in understanding the interplay of individual and organisational factors influencing learning and the development of capability in and for the workplace. Crant's review of the proactive behaviour literature draws together discussions of the phenomenon from various strands of organisational behaviour research including performance management, leadership, careers, socialisation, work teams and feedback seeking. Notably absent is any discussion of proactive behaviour in workplace learning. We suggest that exploration of the notion of proactive behaviour will provide a useful lens through which to increase understanding of individual differences in engagement with workplace learning. Broadly speaking proactivity has been characterised as workers taking an active role in their approach to work in which they seek information, initiate

situations, and create favourable conditions (Crant, 2000). Crant's description here of proactivity appears to be related to a number of factors that *have* been investigated in the employee development and training motivation literature. Variables such as career exploration (identifying ones own skill strengths and weaknesses, as well as career values and interests) and career planning (formulating plans for achieving career goals) are related to motivation to learn (Colquitt, LePine & Noe, 2000). Other constructs such as career insight (similar to exploration; Maurer & Tarulli, 1994, Maurer, Weiss & Barbeite, 2003) and career strategies (similar to career planning; Tharenou, 1997) have also been linked to motivation and training outcomes. These behaviours all reflect elements of Crant's notion of proactivity, and have been shown to be directly related to workplace learning.

In developing a model of antecedents and consequences of proactive behaviour Crant argues that there are two classes of proactive behaviour: 1) challenging the status quo, and 2) creating favourable conditions, that lead to improved job performance and career success. The antecedents of these are a combination of dispositional and situational factors. For instance, personal disposition or proactive personality, and the context of organisational norms towards proactive behaviour.

In an attempt to understand these dispositional factors Frese and Fay (2001) argue that personal initiative and proactivity at work are linked to individual self efficacy and self esteem. We know from early research (Coopersmith, 1967) that the building blocks for self esteem start very early in life and are influenced throughout life. In a work setting it has been found that self esteem is impacted by feedback from managers, job designs which convey trust in workers as competent people, opportunity to experience success and recognition for it (Gardner & Pierce, 1998). Self-efficacy has been extensively researched in the employee development literature, particularly with regard to individual characteristics affecting motivation and participation. Self-efficacy has been strongly linked to motivation to learn, post-training self-efficacy and transfer. It has also been found to have moderate relationships with training outcomes such as declarative knowledge, skill acquisition and job performance (Colquitt et al., 2000). Similarly in the pilot study of our research organisational-based self esteem factors emerged as an important part of the picture of individual willingness to engage with workplace learning and capability

development (Bryson, Mallon & Merritt, 2004). Thus developing a framework that facilitates examining this interplay of personal dispositional factors and organisational/situational factors is important.

There remains significant scope for considering the issue of the workplace as a venue and conduit for learning from the perspectives of both individual and organisation. There is still need for in-depth case study work, to ground further theory development in current workplace practices. Furthermore, studies are still required which look at individual learning in specific context, recognising that individuals will identify a range of structural conditions which may limit or facilitate their development (Huysman, 1999).Thus we chose to look in depth at particular companies, the first of which is reported here, taking account of understanding from the perspective of managers and staff at all levels of the organisation of the learning and development opportunities they perceive as afforded by the organisation. Our key question is:

- What is the relationship between workplace affordances for capability development and individual engagement?
  - Are affordances for development differentially distributed within the company?
  - How does proactivity influence individual engagement with organisational affordances?

In asking these questions we are influenced by the notion of workplaces as expansive or restrictive learning environments (Fuller & Unwin, 2004) and have sought to allow for discussion of a broad range of affordances, activities and opportunities for development offered by the company. We also acknowledge the vital role of individual differences and sought to identify where and why individuals appeared to pro-actively seek out opportunities to develop their capability and where they appeared to resist it.

Method

This case study was conducted as part of a larger scale research study looking at Developing Human Capability. The first case study sector chosen was the wine industry in a particular region of New Zealand. The aim is to do four case studies of wine companies in this region. To date one has been fully completed and another is

in the late stage of analysis, (but only one is reported here) and a further two are underway. The purpose of case studies as Yin (1994) describes is to develop theory, possibly adding to or confirming particular explanations of human capability development in the workplace. We have used this first single case study to explore certain theoretical explanations in the literature. This will also contribute to developing a framework to understand capability development within the context of New Zealand organisations. Ultimately our overall case study design will combine both a collective format (Stake, 1995) and will be layered (Patton, 2002). A collective case study uses multiple cases in a co-ordinated effort to understand the research questions. Layering involves the study of individual cases on their own as well as exploring patterns across cases.

The primary method used was semi-structured interviews, which we report on here. As this research is dealing with peoples' perceptions of what is available to them and exploring how they view their development at work, interviews were regarded as the most appropriate method. Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured (Kvale, 1996). A flexible interview prompt sheet was utilised which was augmented and amended as interviews progressed. While pre-ordained boundaries were not set on the topics that could be explored the interviews were designed to look at both individual and organisational issues. Interviews with employees with no management responsibility explored how their own skills and capabilities had been developed in the organisation; what opportunities they saw to learn and develop and how they reacted to them; their future work and learning plans; and what had been helpful and what had hindered their individual development. Interviews with managers covered the same questions as for employees and in addition asked how they developed subordinates and how the organisation in general approached skill and capability development.

Interviews were held with staff at all levels working in the vineyards or winery – the two core functions of the organisation. Of those working in and around the vineyards we interviewed 3 viticulturalists, 3 vineyard managers, 1 assistant vineyard manager and 3 vineyard workers. Those working in the winery included 2 winemakers, 2 cellar staff and the cellar master. The interviews were all taped and transcribed. Analysis was by the template method (King, 1998) assisted by N6. Codes were

devised which attempted to reflect the organisational learning environment and individual dispositional factors: looking at whether workers experienced an expansive or restrictive learning environment; and considering instances of proactivity. In presenting the data we look at the experiences of employees at different levels of the organisation, and in different functions.

Results

Vineyard Workers and Cellar Hands

Workplace learning affordances available to vineyard workers and cellar hands were on the whole quite restrictive. In general novice employees were expected to develop by observing more experienced workers carrying out tasks, to learn by doing and through guided instruction. The following quotes from a vineyard worker and a vineyard manager clearly highlight the importance of workplace participatory practices for the development of employee capability at this level:

A   *Well I came here knowing nothing and I learn best from watching people. A couple of the guys here are pretty on to it and I just picked up from them.*

Q   *What sort of areas has that happened in? What areas of skill and ability?*

A   *All areas really. Everything from driving a tractor to pruning.*

(Vineyard worker)

Fencing for example, I always put a strong fencer with one of the weaker ones and rather than me getting out there and teaching them, they learn from one of their own fellow workers. It works out far better. You've got to have a structured buddy system but if you go over the top and have a formalised set of things that you've got to tick off, you don't always get the real key important parts of that particular job that you're trying to teach them on this vineyard. I think the big thing to understand is that although all vineyards look the same, there's a huge range of different management practices within particular vineyards… And to get that done I find the best way is to marry up the stronger guys on a particular job with one of the weaker guys and say "ok, off you go, I'll come and see you on Wednesday and see how you're getting on" sort of thing, and it works a treat.

(Vineyard manager)

Although there was a strong emphasis on gaining necessary skills on-the-job there were very few opportunities for participation in any other communities of practice. Learning efforts were very much directed towards specific skills and knowledge required for competent performance in the employees current role. Moreover, most of this learning took place in a single location such as the winery (for cellar hands) or a

particular vineyard (for the vineyard workers). There tended to be little in the way of encouragement for these employees to seek formal knowledge-based qualifications, and although opportunities for some certification were available (e.g. heavy traffic licence, first-aid, grow safe), these were very much the exception and tended to be focussed mainly around compliance issues.

Vineyard workers and cellar hands were largely unqualified and often had minimal experience in the wine or horticulture industries when they first joined the company. For workers at this level, the job was not really perceived as having a career track, and in fact the company displayed a preference for recruiting staff to learn on the job without aspirations to greater career development. In this context development remained restrictive (focussed very much on performance in the job) as a way of managing employee expectations, maintaining a stable workforce, and one might suspect, controlling labour costs. The limited prospects for career progression at this level is evident in the following statement from a senior winemaker:

> *So now we now have gone back and hired a core group of cellar staff that don't have those technical aspirations and they* [are] *working much, much better, they are more stable… We still do get the occasional technical person in but we make it very clear that there are no expectations that there's a wine making job sitting at the end of it.*
>
> (Winemaker)

Organisational recognition and support for employees as learners at this level is mixed. Ability to learn was not identified as a highly desirable attribute, and in contrast attributes such as reliability and team work were seen as far more important.

> *… they need a clear understanding of what they are doing… good common sense, use their time effectively, working as a team, being positive, just able to get on and do the job.*
>
> (Winemaker talking about cellar hands)

There were some areas where these workers did experience what Fuller and Unwin (2004) consider a more expansive learning environment. There is some evidence that there is a shared participative memory with a history of informal apprenticeship, in the sense that learning vineyard tasks has always been carried out on-the-job. There is some evidence of movement towards "reification" of the workplace curriculum most evident in the introduction of a formal skill learning process (skills matrix).

However, even here it might be argued that rather than demonstrating how valued learning is it represents a mechanism for controlling employee remuneration and providing "virtual" opportunities for advancement. This is borne out in one of the vineyards where, for historical reasons, workers were on a different pay system and hence did not bother to complete modules in the skill matrix at all.

Further restrictive aspects of workplace learning included: little boundary crossing; polarised distribution of skills within the organisation; technical skills are valued, but not generally those of employees at this level, and indeed the knowledge and skills of those involved in core activities, particularly winemaking, tend to get more attention. As a result communication tends to be hierarchical and bounded, and we were also left with the clear impression that managers operate as controllers of the workforce and individual development. While some were very active in providing opportunities for some employees this was typically in response to an approach from the employee.

Proactivity

Thus while the learning environment was mostly restrictive, some proactive individuals made more of any available developmental opportunities than others. Among the cellar hands, the staff regarded as more proactive have involved themselves in things outside of work in their own time, like wine tasting groups or even sports teams, but from which there is a positive spill over to the work situation. One of the vineyard workers had begun discussions with his manager regarding undertaking a formal knowledge-based qualification at the local tertiary institute, and told us that "I'd like to be a manager by the time I'm 30, whether it happens or not remains to be seen." Another vineyard worker had taken the opportunity to work in the winery "In the off season one of the guys here has done that, he's into winemaking and I think he spent a week in the winery." These instances show that despite a restrictive learning environment, proactive individuals can still make the most of developmental affordances.

Vineyard Managers and Cellar Master

A picture of a more expansive learning environment emerged at this level, although there were many areas that would be considered restrictive. More so than at lower levels, the vineyard managers and cellar master participated in multiple communities.

They worked closely with the vineyard workers/cellar hands that they managed and were also now involved in a new leadership program requiring them to interact regularly with other vineyard managers, viticulturalists and winemakers in the company. Outside of the company, interaction with other vineyard managers and cellar masters was also apparent, albeit on an informal basis

> *There's lots of guys that I know and we see each other on the road or whatever, pull over and have a yack, come along and have a cup of tea, whatever.*
>
> *(Vineyard Manager)*

Access to learning is broader than that for vineyard workers or cellar hands and all of the managers indicated that, should they need it, some time off for development would be available. Access to formal qualifications was noted. Of the managers we spoke with, only one had any tertiary qualification (Diploma in Horticulture), but it was apparent that the expectation now seems to be that qualifications are a pre-requisite for the position, and for career advancement within the organisation.

> *When I started with [a different company] all those years ago I was just thrown a set of keys to the car and got told "you know where the vineyards are, go and introduce yourself to all the staff there, way you go, see you at the end of the week" sort of thing.*
>
> (Vineyard Manager)

Some of the more restrictive aspects of the vineyard managers' environment included an expectation for vineyard managers that the transition to full competence needs to be immediate. The vision of the organisation for workplace learning is again focussed on job performance with little attention to career development - most development that was reported seemed to be focussed around doing the job and learning by experience.

Proactivity

Individual proactivity seems again to be important among this group. One manager in particular talked about a number of trials and projects that he undertook on his vineyard, very much at his own initiative.

> *It's over to you really, if you want to do a specific project and so forth and it's like this monitoring this irrigation for example, it cost a few extra thousand … They hummed and hawed going through the process "yes, here's the money".*
>
> (Vineyard manager)

Winemakers and Viticulturalists

Capability development for the winemakers and viticulturalists is more expansive than for other positions lower in the company hierarchy. Certainly they have opportunities to participate in multiple communities of practice, and a breadth of learning, inside and outside the workplace through attendance at conferences, courses, liaison with other wine makers and viticulturalists outside the company, and regular meetings with other specialists in the company.

Most winemakers and viticulturalists have completed a tertiary qualification when they join the company. A hierarchy of assistant winemaker, winemaker to chief winemaker exists similar to most winemaking organisations, and this is mirrored for the viticulture positions. They move through a gradual transition to full, rounded participation as winemaker, or as viticulturalist. However, all reported that the career pathway is not entirely clear and it is up to the individual to push ahead and be proactive. As one winemaker observed

in the wine industry quick isn't always a good thing, attention to detail and understanding, the ability to drive change is more important and valued.

Their technical skills are valued, as is team work and cross boundary communication, and innovation. All these in fact appear to be integral to the pursuit of making excellent wine. To this end, proactive behaviour is encouraged:

the company once it provides you with responsibilities is pretty much happy to let you get on and do it….they expect winemakers to drive things along, it's not good enough just to be making the same thing day in day out ….we are always striving to modify procedures to improve the quality.

(Winemaker)

However there were restrictive aspects to the development environment. There was a sense in which development was very much about tailoring individual capability to organisational need, a rather polarised distribution of skills, managers as controllers of development *("if I wanted to attend a conference for example, I would apply to the [senior manager]"*), and limited opportunity for reflection. Much of this also hinged around the time pressures in the work, so that although winemakers and viticulturalists would be afforded various opportunities outside the workplace if they chose to pursue them often work intervened:

there is a lot of technical literature that comes out in the wine industry via a number of key industry magazines…..but time commitments have always been such that you don't often get time to sit down and read them…so a lot of it is getting to do on the job training

(Winemaker)

Proactivity

Clearly these occupational groups enjoy more freedom and flexibility, and qualitatively the workplace development opportunities were quite different to those for other workers. However because of a very informal approach to capability development in this company, it is reliant on proactive individuals to identify, seek out, and to ask for particular opportunities – which the company will generally support if they are related to the business: *"you really have to do it yourself…[the company] expects people to ask, to be proactive"*.

This need for proactive behaviour extends throughout the company: *"really promising people are recognised…not necessarily extremely highly qualified….they just display the right attitudes and want to learn"*. This also suggests that coupled with the requirement for proactive individual behaviour to access opportunities that these may be mediated by supervisors and managers who provide affordances to those who fit attitudinally. However, individual engagement is also clearly influenced by personal priorities and beliefs, some long serving workers thinking that they are too old for further development.

Some Conclusions

At the core of this paper we have used a case to explore individual take-up of workplace capability development opportunities. In particular we have focused on two broad sets of influences on individual engagement commonly highlighted in the literature: a) the features of the organisations capability development opportunities, which have been examined as 'affordances' by Billett, and as an 'expansive-restrictive' continuum of approaches to workforce development by Fuller & Unwin, and; b) the features of the individual worker/learner, which have been explored as 'learning territory' (Fuller & Unwin, 2004), and as 'ontogeny' (Billett, 2002a; 2004). Furthermore, we have suggested additions to our understanding of these two sets of features. First, we sought to examine whether development opportunities are

distributed differentially throughout the organisation hierarchy. Second, our review of the literature surrounding the individual worker or learner indicated that there could be benefit in incorporating notions of proactive behaviour/personality (Crant, 2000) which hitherto have not been used in this context.

This case throws into relief the impact of the nature of the work and the organisation on development opportunities and their take-up by individuals. The work of winemaking and viticulture is dictated by the rhythms of seasons, growth, fermentation and ageing. It requires biding ones time and responding to pressure times. The jobs are scientific, craft, and labour – some have more of one element than another. The organisation infrastructure to support this has a core workforce, and contingent seasonal labour, but it has limited career paths. All these factors prove salient in our examination of development opportunities.

Indeed, this case confirms the suggestions in the literature (Rainbird et al., 2004; Billett, 2004; Fuller & Unwin, 2004) that development opportunities may be differentially experienced according to level in the organisational hierarchy or type of job. The results clearly illustrate the experience of a more expansive development environment by the winemakers and vineyard managers, and a more restrictive development environment by the vineyard workers and cellar hands. However this differential distribution of development opportunities proves functional for the company in a number of ways. Firstly, it mediates the demands of the external and internal labour market. For example, in the external labour market an oversupply of tertiary qualified wine staff who have career expectations has proved an uncomfortable mix with the constraints of limited career pathways in the organisation. This, coupled with the desire for continuity and stability of staff producing quality wines, has led the company to prefer to recruit cellar hands and vineyard workers with more limited immediate career expectations. This is reinforced by a more restrictive approach to development for this segment of the workforce, which in turn allows a greater focus on the job at hand rather than preparing for the next career step.

This is not a surprising finding, and will not be peculiar to the wine industry. Many organisations have positions with limited internal career progression. Such positions are essential to the functioning of most organisations. Difficulty emerges when one

tries to equate this with the embedded assumption of much learning and development literature that development leads one upward in the organisational hierarchy. However, for a number of the workers we interviewed although they enjoyed the job their focus was on non-work lifestyle pursuits (e.g., hunting, fishing, farming, family, etc). It is a trap to assume that all people want to put their discretionary energy into paid work or work related development. That said, it is also a trap to assume that all workers have the confidence or initiative to advocate for their own development. The preceding case shows a company in which take-up of development opportunities was influenced by proactive individual behaviour – if you asked, made the time, shaped the work environment to suit, then you would likely get the development you desired. Even at the most basic level of on the job learning some proactivity was required with workers at all levels reporting a "sink or swim" attitude to throwing people in the deep end as a good way to learn. One could speculate that interesting tensions could emerge for a company that desires workers who are proactive on the job but are not career driven.

Related to this, a workforce with limited prior experience of formal education or training is less likely to seek and accept those formal opportunities unless they are consistently encouraged or supported to do so by supervisors and the organisation. Certainly it was clear in this company that managers/supervisors mediated access to development opportunities and also influenced whether people took up such opportunities. As Billett has suggested it seems that a dual and reciprocal relationship exists between the work environment and the individual. A seemingly restrictive development environment may be experienced as far more expansive by a proactive individual; just as an expansive environment may be experienced as restrictive by a resistant or reluctant individual. Thus proactive behaviour is an important additional consideration in understanding individual take-up of development opportunities, and access to affordances. We suggest that this may have implications for measures of learning climate.

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